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The Influence of Family on Adolescents' Use of Leisure

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Abstract

The present study aims to provide a descriptive analysis of how Greek 15 and 16-year-old dispose their free time as a result of their parents' level of education, occupation and income. For the collection of data, survey research with the questionnaire as the methodological tool was conducted in a sample size of 663 high school students of Thessaloniki during March and April 2011. Findings indicated that parents' level of education, occupation and income play an important role in the determination of some of their children leisure activities. The extent of family effect, however, while considerable, is not overwhelming enough to justify a general conclusion that teenagers' extra curricula activities are shaped as an outcome of parental socioeconomic status.

Keywords: Leisure, Adolescents, Parents, Family, Greece.

Introduction

Leisure does not represent a homogenous category of behavior and there is little consistency in terms of the formulation of a precise commonly accepted definition that contains all its meanings and dimensions and also in terms of how leisure activities are categorized and defined. However, this lack of consistency is of trivial importance in comparison with the understanding of its significance and content. Specifically, there is general consensus that leisure -distinguished by the individual's perceived freedom to act and distinguished from conditions imposed by necessity and the demands of work or other duties (Cushman & Laidler, 1990: 1)- can provide numerous benefits, among which are relaxation, pleasure, recreation, diversion, reward for work, social achievement, personal development, mutual understanding, a healthy mind and body (Gist & Fava, 1964, p. 411; Kaplan, 1975, p. 26; Rojek, 2010, p. 1-2).

Historically, the significant enlargement of leisure time is placed at the begging of the 20th century and is associated with the change in the working conditions caused by the technological enhancement. The idea that increasing automation and the consequent increase in labour productivity would reduce the demand for labour seems to have risen to prominence in the 1920s and 1930s. Mumford (1934, p. 279) predicted, and called for, a society arising from a completely mechanized and automatized system of power production, which will lead to the

reduction of work and to the universal achievement of leisure. Indeed, science and the machine reshaped traditional patterns into hundreds of new forms and as a result working men and women found countless pleasures and amusements readily available that had once been restricted to the privileged few. This overwhelming shift prompted Dulles (1965, p. 397) to conclude that people of no other age had ever had anything like the leisure, the discretionary income, or the recreational choices of the American people in midtwentieth-century.

However, a number of commentators pointed out that, while increased leisure time for the masses could be seen as a boon and a means to outweigh the ills of a machine age (Pack, 1934, p. 240), it could also be seen as a problem, depending on how the time was used. Given that Western industrial culture had hitherto been work orientated with limited leisure time for most, it was believed that many were ill-equipped to make 'good' use of extended periods of leisure. Cutten (1926, p. 87) mentioned that people have taught how to make money but not how to spend it, have taught how to obtain leisure but not how to use it. It became apparent that the sudden acquisition of leisure found many people unprepared for the correct use of it, under the assumption that they could not use it to the best advantage, namely in order to avoid psychological and physical harm and incidentally 'improve' themselves by enriching memory and imagination or by developing physical strength and skill (May & Petgen, 1928, p. 5-6). In the 1950s, a sequence of commentators – Friedman, Ellul, Marcuse, Fromm, Wilensky – concluded that leisure for most people would be controlled and alienating despite the significantly reduced working hours. Three decades later Newman (1983, p. 101) contemplated leisure as consumption-related and conforming to 'technological' values and hence not the supreme vehicle for self-actualization, but rather one of the prime instruments for social control.

The grave concern about peoples' use of leisure was, during the last two decades, focused especially on adolescents, since they spend dramatically less time than in the agrarian past in household and income-generating labor. As Larson (2001) noted, if we look back over the past 200 years, the most striking historic change in young people's use of time is that they spend much less time on labor activities and much more on schooling today. The underlying question is whether they are spending their time in ways that are healthy, creative and constructive. Moreover, another research field arose is the examination of the factors that play an important role in the adolescents' use of leisure activities, namely the freely chosen and 'non-obligatory' in nature activities, thereby excluding time spent at school and doing school work after school, time spent on household chores and time spent in paid employment (Byrne et al. 2006). Among many factors, it is of great interest to examine the gravity of family's influence, since as a child moves into adolescence, he or she experiences increased freedom to engage in self-managed leisure opportunities because parents begin to relax their authority and allow room for their adolescents' growing need for autonomy and responsibility.

Literature Review on the Influence of Family on Adolescents' use of Leisure

The empirical quantitative and qualitative studies concerning the record and the examination of the family's influence on the adolescents' use of leisure are usually conducted by sociology, psychology and education researchers. Also, some of them have been conducted by polling companies or by organizations and institutions of public or private sector, which have the appropriate infrastructure, the necessary number of staff and the financial requirements for the completion of lengthy and costly research efforts. Most of the studies have been conducted in

Anglo-Saxon countries and especially in the U.S., a country where the problem of disposal of leisure raises the concern of the average citizen and arouses the special interest of the scientific community. This literature review presents the body of research concerning the influence of only the family's occupation, level of education and income (namely socioeconomic status) on their children's use of free time.

Price et al. (2009) and Wight et al. (2009), using the American Time Use Survey data to describe the time use of 2,059 15 to 17 year old, concluded that adolescents with more educated mothers spend more time studying and on the computer, less time watching television, and are more likely to eat dinner with parents. Also, they found that income correlates positively with teenagers' paid work, homework, computer use and the likelihood of eating with parents, but is negatively associated with sleep. Zeijl et al. (2001) in their survey concerning leisure activities among adolescents in the Netherlands found significant effects pertaining to social class, with young adolescents from higher social classes accessing more organised or structured leisure activities than those from lower social classes. Almost all of the younger boys from the lower social classes fitted into a pattern of unstructured leisure (mainly included playing outside and engaging in computer activities-game), while pre-adolescents from higher social classes engaged in a wider range of activities, since they had more access to, and opportunities to experience, a greater diversity of leisure activities. Towards the same direction, Daly & Leonard (2002) described how 12 to 16-year-olds from low-income families in Ireland frequently engaged in unstructured leisure activities with little cost attached, such as watching television, listening to music and hanging around with friends. Indeed, only 2 out of 25 teenagers interviewed participated in organised activities. More of the boys were involved in sport, and young people living outside Dublin had a more limited range of activities available to them. Meeting friends and 'just hanging around' was the most frequently cited activity by the young people. Similar results were found in Hofferth's & Sandberg's (2001) and Ridge's (2002) studies. The authors reported that younger English children and adolescents from low-income families most frequently spend their free time watching television and playing outside with friends, and only few of them were attending any clubs or structured leisure activities with their peers. On the contrary, children with highly educated parents spend more time on homework and reading and less time on television. Moreover, Zill, Nord & Loomis (1995) also showed that there is considerable inequality in the extent to which different groups of American teens use their free time in constructive as opposed to idle or detrimental ways. Specifically, their research data indicated that young people from families with low levels of parent education or family income, who would seem to be most in need of organized skill-building and character-nurturing activities, were found to be least likely to engage in such activities. Similarly, Bodovski & Farkas (2008) and Cheadle & Amato (2010) confirmed that higher family socioeconomic status are strongly and positively correlated with concerted cultivation, such as with increased music and arts lessons. Also, Lellock (2013), studying a sample of 2.465 American 6 to 19-year-olds, indicated, in general, that both arts-activity participation as well as cultural performance attendance are significantly, but moderately weakly correlated with income/wealth measures and with occupation as well. Lastly, according to McMeeking & Purkayastha (1995); Zeijl et al. (2000), middle-class children have more independence and freedom from parents in their leisure than working-class children.

The interpretation of the phenomenon of the family's socioeconomic characteristics influence on adolescents' use of leisure is attributed mainly to the range of opportunities offered,

which are differentiated according to parents' income and education level. Róiste & Dinneen (2005), who investigated the opportunities, supports and barriers to recreation and leisure for 2,260 12-18 year old Irish students, concluded that significant numbers of young people from lower socioeconomic groups are more likely to experience financial barriers to leisure activities. Mayock & Byrne (2004) in a qualitative study of 41 Irish teenagers found that those living in poor neighborhoods of inadequate leisure amenities and recreational facilities mostly engage in unstructured activities, such as playing football, hanging around with friends, watching television, playing computer games and even consuming alcohol.

In conclusion, findings from the growing body of published research papers indicated that the parents' socioeconomic status plays an important role in the determination of their children leisure activities. These activities seem to be structured, organized, active and constructive for most of the teenagers from middle-high socioeconomic status, whereas unstructured and informal for most of the teenagers from low socioeconomic background.

Aims of the Study

Despite the fact that in the wider context of sociology of leisure the relation between family and children use of leisure has adequately been detected by theorists and researchers in Anglo-Saxon countries, in Greece one cannot find relevant surveys. The present empirical study aims to fill this evident gap in the literature. Its primary purpose is to provide a descriptive analysis of how Greek 15 and 16 year old teenagers dispose their free time as a result of their parents' level of education, occupation and income. More simply, the main focus of the study lies in the question: To what extent are teenagers' extra curricula activities –namely those formed after school obligations- determined by their socioeconomic background? Simultaneously, a critical and interpretative approach is attempted.

Sample and Method of the Study

For the collection of data, survey research with the questionnaire as the methodological tool was conducted. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part included questions related to the socioeconomic status of the participants' parents. The second part included questions designed to detect the adolescents' weekly amount of free time and the hours they devote during this time to watch television, surf on the internet, play video games, listen to music, read extracurricular books, newspapers and magazines. Also, the second part of the questionnaire included questions concerning the teenagers' favorite newspaper and magazine issues-sections-materials, the kind of programs they usually watch on television and the reasons for using the internet. Lastly, the frequency of several leisure activities was examined, such as hanging around with friends, watching sporting events at stadiums-courts-arenas, playing an instrument, visiting museums, going to the movies or to the theatre and participating in voluntary work.

The sample consisted of 663 high school students of Thessaloniki, which is the second biggest Greek city with approximately 1,000,000 residents. Stratified random sampling technique (Lohr, 2009: 73-101) was used. Having as key criterion the socioeconomic stratification of their inhabitants, six high schools were randomly selected from three zone areas of the prefecture of Thessaloniki during March and April 2011. Specifically, 35.04% of the participants attended high schools situated in the center of the city (where people from middle socioeconomic status live), 32.7% in the eastern side of the city (where people from higher socioeconomic status live) and

32.2% in the western side (where people from lower socioeconomic status live). Regarding gender, 49.2% of those who answered the questionnaire were males and 50.8% females. Regarding age, 68.6% were 15 years old and 31.4% were 16 years old. As far as their family level of education is concerned, 14.4% of the fathers had elementary education, 31.1% had graduated high school, 22.2% had a degree from Technical Meta-Secondary School and 32.3% had a university degree. Similar were the results concerning mothers' education level, as 8.8% had elementary education, 33% had graduated high school, 19.5% obtained a Technical Meta-Secondary School degree and 33.3% a university degree.

Results - Discussion

According to the results, the mean of Greek adolescents' free time is 25.6 hours weekly (3.7 per day). Their family's income seems to be an important factor ($F=8.879(2,498)$, $p=0.00$) that differentiates the amount of free time, as it decreases to 20.5 for those whom their parents gain more than 4000 Euros and it increases to 29.3 for those whom their parents gain from 2001 to 4000 Euros. In the middle (23.1) we find adolescents whom their parents' income does not exceed 2000 Euros. This finding, which shows that teenagers of higher economic status have less free time, could be attributed to the fact that wealthy parents may afford their children's participation to many costly activities, whereas young people from lower socioeconomic groups are more likely to experience financial barriers to leisure activities.

Furthermore, empirical data shows that their most frequent activities are listening to music (13 hours per week), surfing on the internet (9.5 hours) and watching television (7.3 hours). Playing video games (3.8 hours) and reading extracurricular books (3.8 hours) are moderately popular, whereas the least preferred activities are reading magazines (2 hours) and newspapers (1.8 hours). This weekly time disposal is, according to the inferential statistics conducted, influenced mostly by their parents profession. Specifically, teenagers whom their father practice scientific professions spend weekly 0.7 hours more reading extracurricular books and also 1.7 and 0.8 hours less time respectively watching television and playing video games than the participants whom their father has a low class job. The amount of time spend in these three activities is also influenced by the mother's occupation and level of education. Particularly, adolescents whom their mother enjoys high occupational prestige devote weekly 1.1 more hours reading extracurricular books and 2.6 and 2.1 more hours respectively watching television and playing video games than those whom their mother holds an occupation of low admiration and respect. Also, towards the same direction is the influence of the mother's education level. Specifically, adolescents of mothers with a university degree read extracurricular books for 3.2 hours weekly and play video games for 3.2 hours, whereas the time spent in such activities is decreased to 1.6 and 4.7 respectively for the participants of mothers who have only graduated high school. Thus, it can be maintained that well educated parents with a profession of high social status steer their children to spiritual activities, such as reading extracurricular books, and simultaneously discourage them from engaging in less constructive activities, such as watching television and playing video games.

Moreover, the survey examined the frequency of several leisure activities (Table 1). The most popular activity turned out to be hanging out with friends, as the 57.4% of the participants stated that they meet their friends everyday and the 26.1% two or three times a week. Two of the three mentioned at the questionnaire activities related to sports seem fairly popular.

Particularly, 13.1% of the adolescents play sports with their friends everyday, 26.8% two or three times a week and 19.4 once a week. Also, 41.4% of the adolescents attend live sporting events at least once a week. However, 51.5% of them do not participate in sport teams at all. At least once a week seven out of ten respond that they go to cafes or bars, but with such frequency only one out of ten goes to the movies, 2.4% watch theatrical plays and 3.9% visit museums. Approximately seven out of ten do not spend any of their free time in either playing a musical instrument or volunteering work as members of relative Organizations. Only the first of the last three activities appears to be statistically significant to all five independent factors of the study. Specifically, teenagers with wealthy, educated fathers and mothers who practice scientific professions spend significantly more time playing a musical instrument. Thus, well-educated parents acknowledge the importance of such an activity to the development of their children skills and also affluent parents can afford the costly tuitions. Moreover, participants of well-educated fathers and mothers devote statistically significantly more time watching theatrical plays, visiting museums and volunteering than those of low-educated parents. This result could be attributed to the logical assumption that the more educated the parent is the deeper he/she can penetrate the importance of such spiritual or selfless/humanitarian activities, and consequently can persistently steer his/her child to them. Lastly, teenagers from middle-high socioeconomic status spend more time attending live sporting events and playing as member of a sport team. This result can be explained by the fact that low-income parents cannot afford the financial burden of covering the costs of their children participation in a team or attendance to live sporting events.

Table 1. How often do you spend time in these activities? (1: Never, 2: Once every six months, 3: Once a month, 4: Two or three times a month, 5: Once a week, 6: Two or three times a week, 7: Everyday)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Hang out with friends?	0.6	1.4	1.8	3.3	9.4	26.1	57.4
Play sports with friends?	9.9	9.8	10.4	10.7	19.4	26.8	13.1
Play as member of sport team?	51.5	5.2	1.8	3.5	7.3	14.8	15.7
Attend live sporting events?	23.1	12.2	12.1	11.3	12.7	16.0	12.7
Go to cafes/bars?	4.4	5.8	9.7	10.7	33.5	28.9	7.0
Play a musical instrument?	68.9	5.8	2.9	3.0	3.7	3.5	12.2
Visit museums?	44.1	37.2	10.5	4.4	1.7	1.4	0.8
Go to the theatre?	45.5	37.5	9.6	5.2	0.8	0.8	0.8
Go to the movies?	6.8	28.6	32.4	21.1	7.8	2.0	1.4
Do volunteer work as member of relative Organizations?	70.7	16.0	4.8	3.2	3.1	1.1	1.2

Conclusion

Leisure is a context in which adolescents are encouraged to manage their own experiences by exerting personal control over their environments and acting autonomously (Brown & Theobald, 1998). However, the question arises at this point is whether the preferences, choices, tendencies, motivations and priorities of an adolescent are shaped only by his/her own personal will or they are determined by his/her parent’ socioeconomic status. The existence, the extent/gravity and

the direction of such a determination was the aim of the present quantitative empirical study conducted in a sample size of 663 high school students of Thessaloniki.

Briefly, findings indicated that parents' level of education, occupation and income play an important role in the determination of some of their children leisure activities. The extent of family effect, however, while considerable/notable, is not overwhelming enough to justify a general conclusion that teenagers' extra curricula activities are shaped as an outcome of parental socioeconomic status. More specifically, adolescents of middle-high socioeconomic background seem to engage in some more structured (attending live sporting events and playing as member of a sport team), spiritual and constructive (reading extracurricular books, playing a musical instrument, watching theatrical plays, visiting museums and volunteering) activities than their peers of low socioeconomic background. This finding is consistent with Bourdieu's (1986); Lareau's (2003); Collins's (2000) concept of social reproduction, according to which the development of many behavioral traits of children from different social statuses is linked/correlated to the unequal distribution of cultural capital among social classes, the main forming factors of which are the level of parents' formal education, occupation and income.

However, as far as the qualitative use of leisure is concerned, it must be highlighted that only in some of the extra curricula activities are the adolescents from middle-high socioeconomic status favorably engaged. Particularly, no statistically significant relation was found between parental socioeconomic status and the reasons children use the internet, the sections of a newspaper or a magazine they read and the kind of programs they watch on television. Thus, it can be argued that, since the under-investigation family factors do not affect teenagers' time disposal in the whole in terms of its use in constructive as opposed to detrimental ways, further research should be conducted in order to reveal the whole spectrum of determinants or factors. Although leisure behavior is considerably unequal and differentiated due to parental characteristics, it seems that there are more explanatory variables (to be identified) in a wide range of settings which are essentially associated with certain motivations and priorities of an adolescent.

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